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The Ancestral Trail

AN EPIC STORY OF MYTHS, MAGIC AND MONSTERS

24 Syrus, Spirit of the Sky

Devilish Dealings with a Devious Genie

Julek Heller

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From a story by Frank Graves

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On the Twenty-Fourth Day . . .

When risen from enchanted blight
A slender hope across the height
Takes them to the torrent's door.
Swept by spirit off the floor
Then in evil's clutches bound.
Break with thrice the backwards sound
Of names of those so tightly held
The genie's magic rudely spelled.

As the companions stared at the waterfall, Richard scanned the sheer rockface. The water fell in torrents between towering cliffs. There was no way of getting through Sorcerer's Falls. Richard turned to the dwarf. "Melek, what does the *Book of Prophecies* have to say?" he asked. "Maybe it holds a clue to the way through this waterfall."

The dwarf opened the book and read the riddle out loud. As Melek finished, Richard looked around the steep cliffs and spotted something he had not noticed before. Running along the rockface was a narrow fault line, the result of some ancient subsidence. Where the rock had shifted there was now a slight ledge which rose diagonally to a point mid-way up the falls.

Moment of danger

"A slender hope across the height! That's where we go," Richard said.

When he approached the ledge, he had second thoughts. It really was a slender hope – the ledge was very narrow, and the cliff above it sloped gently outwards. They could just get along it, he reckoned, but the water spray made visibility virtually non-existent.

Richard went first. With his body pressed close to the cliff, he moved cautiously along the ledge. Behind him came Orkan, then Melek. It was a nerve-racking journey. The sloping cliff forced them to bend their bodies in a painful arc and gave them the impression they were about to be pushed over the edge.

The higher the ledge climbed, the more terrifying their ordeal became. Every pebble underfoot, every bulge in the cliff became a source of possible disaster.

When they reached the cascading water, conditions eased. The ledge widened, the cliff straightened out, and they found themselves on a path that curved gently into the falling torrent. Richard took a deep breath and stepped into the wall of water.

Through Sorcerer's Falls

The waterfall was surprisingly thin, more of a curtain than a wall, and after a few paces Richard emerged on the other side. Ahead of him, a tunnel sloped gently up into the heart of the mountain. Orkan joined him seconds later. Then came Melek, crouching over the *Book of Prophecies* to protect it from the deluge.

"That wasn't too bad," Richard said as the dwarf shouldered the book again. "We'd better get on."

The tunnel in front of the trio was lit by an eerie glow that seemed to come from the walls. As they walked along, their footsteps rang with a strange, liquid echo. After a while, Richard saw a small wisp of smoke curling out of the floor ahead.

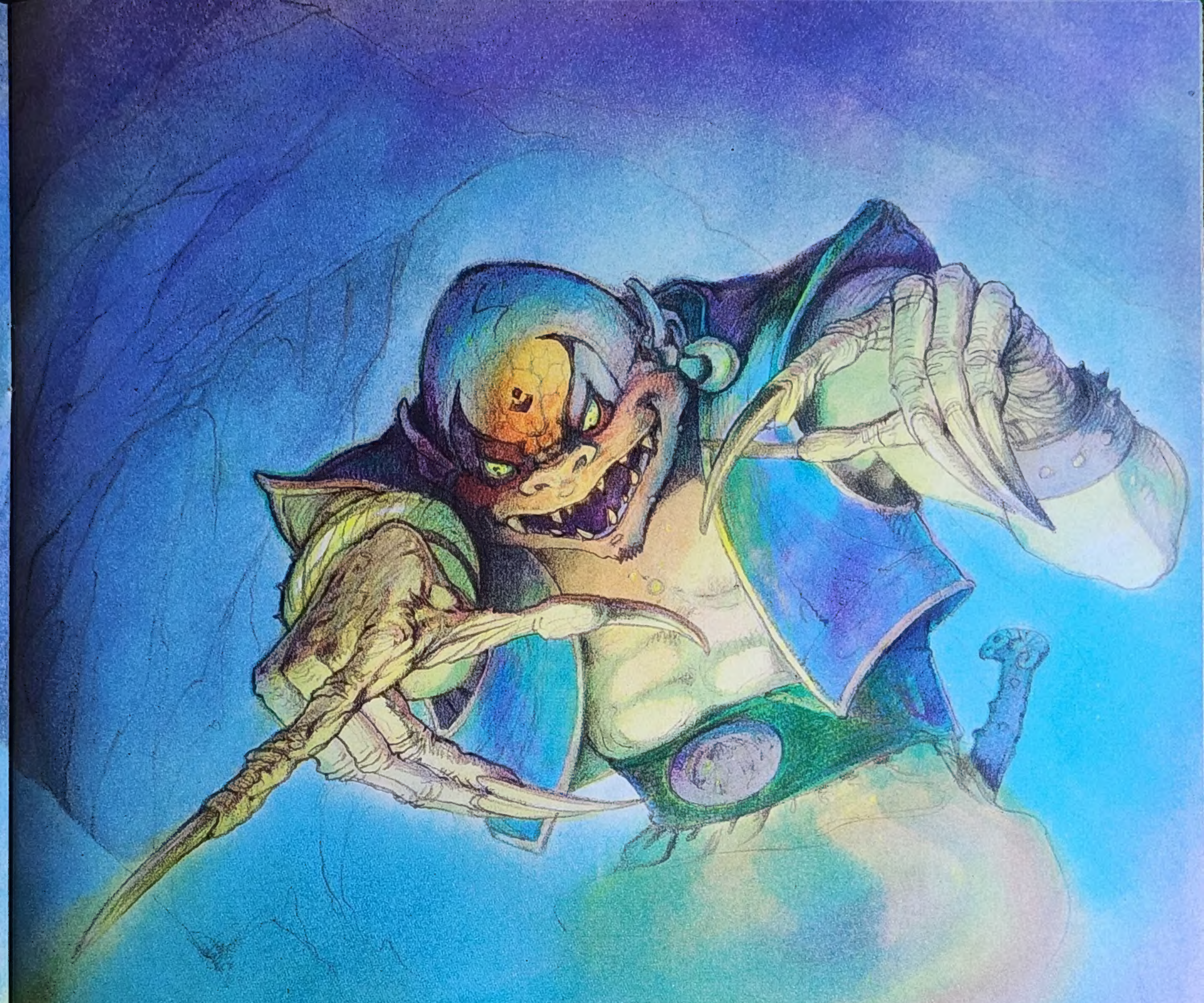
Ghostly apparition

The delicate spiral grew rapidly until it was a tall column of white vapour shot through with tiny sparks of light that twinkled in all the colours of the rainbow. Richard stared in amazement as the pillar of smoke drifted slowly in their direction.

The smoke began to mould itself into another shape. First a round, bald head, with pointed ears and a cruel mouth appeared. Then came broad shoulders, set above a muscled torso that shone as if it had been oiled. The lower half of the apparition was nothing more than smoke. The creature was a genie.

"Who dares enter the realm of Syrus, spirit of the sky?" the genie demanded.

Richard's mind worked fast. They were too near their goal to jeopardize matters



with an unnecessary fight. Richard tried to placate the creature.

"We mean no harm, Syrus," Richard said. "We only want to reach Wizard's Well. We apologize for coming into your domain uninvited. Please allow us through."

Syrus's face writhed in derision. "You can't fool me," he laughed. "I know why you want to get to Wizard's Well."

Syrus pointed one long-nailed finger in their direction, freezing the trio in mid-movement.

"I think it's time you learned a lesson," the genie said, raising another finger.

Multi-coloured smoke oozed from the floor and enveloped them in a thick cone. They felt themselves rise gently off the ground, then they were in Syrus's huge palm.

In the genie's grip

"Now you're mine," Syrus said, glaring at the three in his open hand. Pointed nails clicked like a prison gate as the genie's fingers closed around the trio. The creature floated back up the tunnel, holding the three tightly in his grip. The cone of smoke followed in his wake.

Trapped in Syrus's fog, their vision blocked by wreaths of smoke, the companions felt as if time and distance had dissolved into a blur.

When the trio's journey came to an end, it took them all by surprise. The smoke vanished in the blink of an eye, the genie's hands opened, and the companions fell jarringly to the ground. To their relief they discovered they were able to move once more.

The three were in a high-ceilinged room whose walls were swathed in drapes of brilliant silk. The rich, mahogany floor was strewn with exotic rugs. Syrus floated before them, surrounded on all sides by a carpet of grey bubbles. Inside the bubbles, Richard was amazed to see scores of tiny figures.

Bolt from the blue

"This is your final destination," Syrus boomed. "I hope you like it – you're going to be here a very long time so get used to it."

Orkan unslung his bow and, notching in an arrow, he drew it and aimed it at the genie.

Syrus gave a wry grin, then pointed a finger at the trio. Darkness fell over them like a thunderclap. When it cleared they were standing in exactly the same spot, but they had been shrunk to the size of dolls and trapped in one of the bubbles that drifted over the floor.

"Enjoy yourselves," the genie cackled. He clapped his hands and disappeared in a blinding flash.

The trio pushed and stabbed at the walls of the bubble, but it was made of a thin, rubbery material that defied all attempts to puncture it.

JOINING FORCES

"Let's get over to one of the other bubbles and see who's in them," Richard said.

By walking up the sides of their spherical prison, the three were able to roll it along the floor until it bumped into one of the other bubbles.

"It's my people," Melek cried, peering through the grey membrane. "It's the Landsmen!"

"Ask them what's been going on," Richard said. "Maybe we can help each other to escape."

Melek struck up a long conversation with one of his captured kinsfolk, probing him on every aspect of their prison and Syrus. Richard and Orkan listened enthralled and did not interrupt the Landsman as he told Melek about their capture.

Syrus was keeping them here until the

Evil One arrived. They had tried everything to break the bubbles by force, but nothing worked. The bubbles had been created by magic and only magic could destroy them.

Bursting the bubbles

"When is the Evil One coming?" Richard asked urgently.

"We're not sure," the Landsman called back, "but he must not find us here."

"Magic," Richard pondered. "Didn't the prophecy say something about spells?"

"Break with thrice the backwards sound,
Of names of those so tightly held, The genie's magic rudely spelled," Melek quoted out loud.

"I wonder," Richard mused. "Let's try saying our names backwards three times."

"Kelem! Nakro! Drahcir!" Each repeated the incantation three times. The bubble burst, releasing an oily smoke that floated up to the ceiling.

Richard called for the Landsmen to do the same and soon the room resounded to a babble of outlandish words and the

popping of bubbles. By the time all the Landsmen were free, a dark smog hung heavily above the chandeliers.

The Landsmen's leader, a thin, lugubrious man with a big nose, came up to Richard and introduced himself.

"My name's Ronek," he said. "Thank you for what you've done. Now, all we need is to get back to normal size."

It was something Richard had not considered. Ronek was right. Somehow they had to find a way of regaining their usual height. There was nothing in the prophecy that told them how to do that.

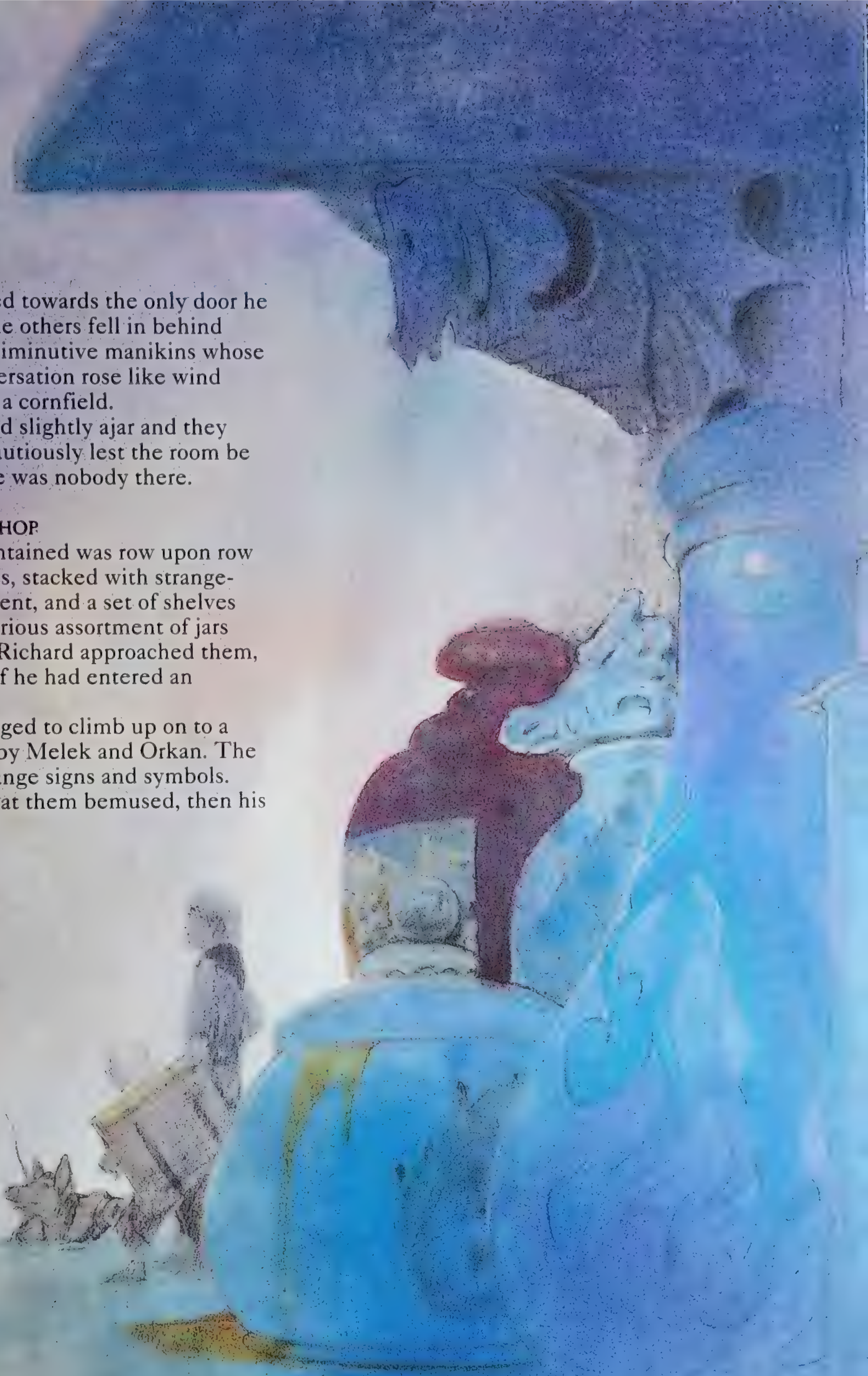
Richard walked towards the only door he could see and the others fell in behind him, a flock of diminutive manikins whose whispered conversation rose like wind sighing through a cornfield.

The door stood slightly ajar and they approached it cautiously lest the room be occupied. There was nobody there.

Genie's workshop

All the room contained was row upon row of wooden tables, stacked with strange-looking equipment, and a set of shelves holding a mysterious assortment of jars and bottles. As Richard approached them, his hair rose as if he had entered an electrical field.

Richard managed to climb up on to a shelf, followed by Melek and Orkan. The bottles bore strange signs and symbols. Richard looked at them bemused, then his



instinct led him to a bottle which he somehow knew was the one whose contents would break the spell.

Calling on some Landsmen to help him, Richard managed to get the bottle on to its side. Cautiously he pulled out the stopper, and a thick pink liquid started to ooze slowly from the top. Richard rubbed a small amount on to the back of his hand.

For a moment nothing happened. Then, with startling speed, Richard soared to his original height, toppling to the floor as he did so. He quickly stood up, took the bottle from the shelf and allowed the liquid to ooze out on to the floor.

He called Orkan, Melek and the Landsmen over and told everyone to rub some of the liquid on to their skin. Soon everyone was back to their original size.

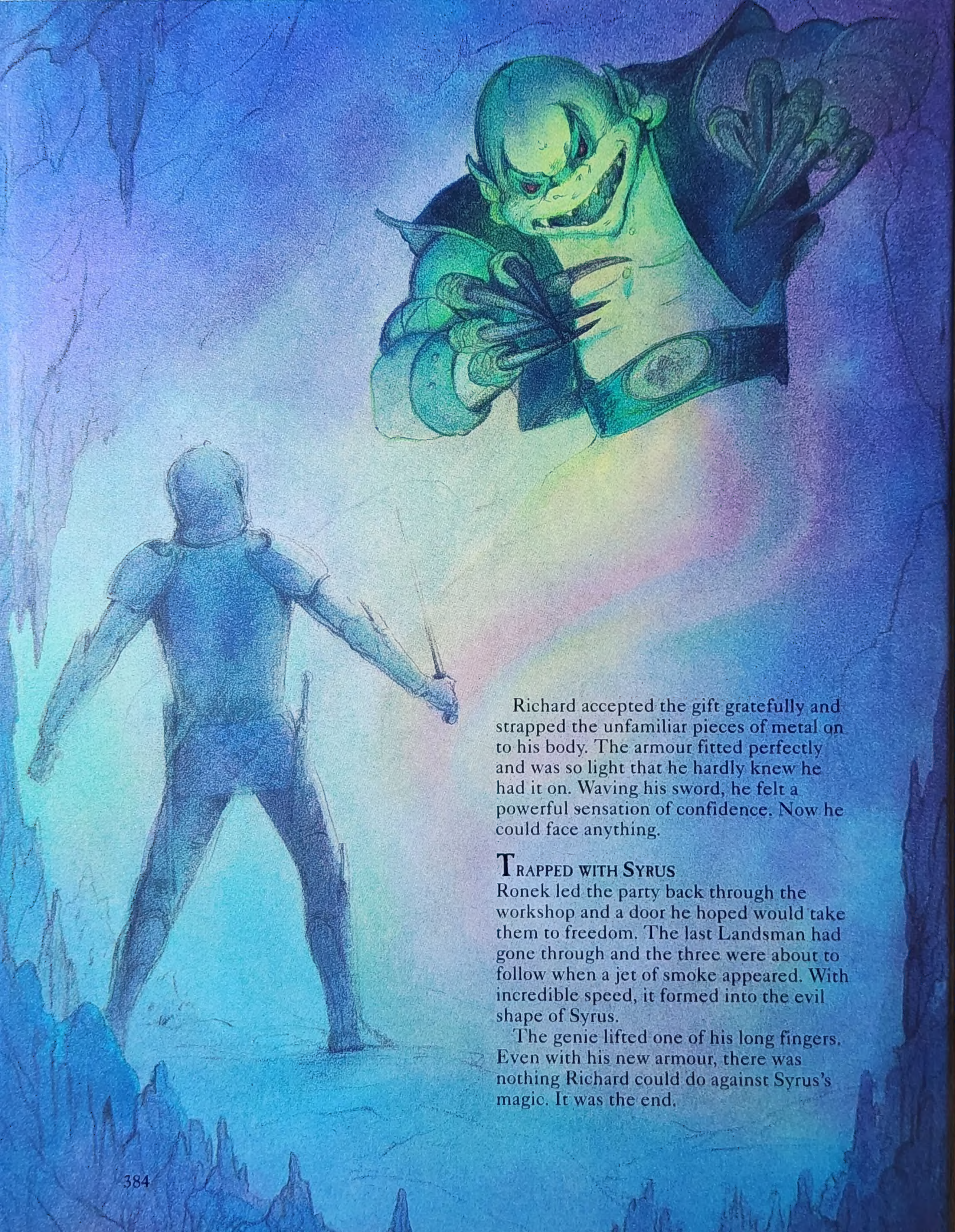
Hero's armour

"Let's go quickly," Richard said. "Syrus may be back any minute."

"We can't leave yet," Ronek replied. "We must go back for our weapons."

Ronek led the way back to the room in which they had been imprisoned. Resting against the far wall was a jumble of weapons and armour which Ronek's men quickly reclaimed. When they had finished, there remained one suit of shining silver armour.

"This belonged to one of our greatest heroes," Ronek told Richard. "He was killed when we were captured by Syrus. Now it is yours."



Richard accepted the gift gratefully and strapped the unfamiliar pieces of metal on to his body. The armour fitted perfectly and was so light that he hardly knew he had it on. Waving his sword, he felt a powerful sensation of confidence. Now he could face anything.

Trapped with Syrus

Ronek led the party back through the workshop and a door he hoped would take them to freedom. The last Landsman had gone through and the three were about to follow when a jet of smoke appeared. With incredible speed, it formed into the evil shape of Syrus.

The genie lifted one of his long fingers. Even with his new armour, there was nothing Richard could do against Syrus's magic. It was the end.

Shoomi's Sanctuary

Come into this ancient domain and use your powers of observation to find . . .

Shoomi and Shoobi

This friendly pair are still following the trail. Look out for them somewhere in the illustrations in this issue.

In issue 23, Shoomi and Shoobi could be found on pages 353 and 366.

Puzzle Map

Cut out the map piece. Work out where it fits and glue in position on the Ancestral World puzzle map.

Power of Evil

Cut out the letter block and keep it safe. A clue will be given in issue 26 that will help you form the letters into a phrase that reveals the source of the Evil One's power.

NB The competition will be open to residents of the UK and Eire only.

3-Minute Challenge

Spell Stopper

Richard's instinct led him to the bottle that contained the right potion to break Syrus's spell and get everyone back to their normal size. Look at the bottles on pages 380 and 381. Can you spot the one Richard chose in less than 3 minutes?

In issue 23, the fragment of the Evil One's mask was hidden in the rock formations on page 364.

Life Force Pod

Did you spot the clue in issue 23 telling you which pod Richard had found in Loktar's pyramid?

The clue was on page 366. Richard had found the Pod of Knowledge.

Monsters and Magic

When you have finished reading about the Spirit of the Sky, read the Genie of the Lamp and Beelzebub on Morbane's story cards. Which of these characters do you think Syrus is based on?

In issue 23, Dagmar, the Demon of Fire, was based on the Chimera.

Check your answers in the next issue.

The Ancestral Trail

Cut out the location recorder and add it to your pieces for the role-playing game. Remember to keep all your pieces safe for future use.

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In Issue 25

Fenrar, the Desert Stalker

After a long hot trek, the trio find a refreshing welcome in the cool blue waters at Wizard's Well. The last pod is near at hand, but danger and deception also await at this oasis.

plus

- Morbane tells us about two creatures who are not exactly what they first appear to be.
- More tokens and a location recorder for **The Ancestral Trail** role-playing game.

Coming in Issue 26

The Evil One

Richard's search for the Life Force pods is over, but the battle for good over evil must still be fought and won. Can the Ancestral World be saved from disaster?

plus

From Morbane – stories about beings who never really die • The final piece for the puzzle map • More tokens for the role-playing game.

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